

The St. James  
**Daily Devotional Guide**  
for the Christian Year



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# Using This Guide

Under each day's heading there are four parts:

- (1) A Gospel reading, recommended for morning devotion;
- (2) A second reading, usually from the New Testament, recommended for evening devotion;
- (3) Morning and Evening Psalms (set respectively before and after a small symbol †); and
- (4) A daily chapter, usually from the Old Testament, to be read whenever convenient.

**Morning Psalms** may be begun with the following verse:

*Lord, open Thou my lips,  
and my mouth shall declare Thy praise.*

and **Evening Psalms** with this verse:

*O God, make haste to deliver me;  
O Lord, make haste to help me.*

This is followed in each instance by the *Gloria Patri* either sung or spoken in some form, such as:

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever  
shall be, unto the ages of ages. Amen.*

The Psalms may be read, spoken, or said responsively, followed by a prayer (such as that given with each week).

Following the prayer (whether at Morning or Evening Psalms) the appropriate Bible section may be read. After this, there may be a time of intercessory prayer for personal needs and the needs of others or similar petitions (see page 19), and a benediction (see page 20). Following a very ancient tradition of the Church (already in the *Didache* by A.D. 100), we recommend that the Lord's Prayer *always* be part of these devotions.

The reading listed last each day—the *daily chapter*—may be read at any time during the day, including at morning or evening prayer. But if time is spent not only to read but also to study the passage, it may be more natural to do so separately. As you go through the two-year cycle of Bible readings, you will want to become familiar with each biblical book by reading the introduction to that book in the notes at the back of the guide.

# The Daily Bible Readings

**T**he traditional “lectionaries,” or systematic readings, of Holy Scripture are of two kinds: (1) *lectio continua*, which means reading a given book of the Bible straight through, from start to finish, over a certain period of time; and (2) *lectio selecta*, which means that particular readings are chosen for particular days or special reasons, without the intention of reading all of a given book of the Bible. Both methods are inherited from Judaism and have been in constant use among Christians from the beginning.

Each method has its own merits. The “continuous reading” guarantees that whole books of Holy Scripture will be read within the contexts of their literary integrity and specific theological perspectives. The “select reading” picks biblical passages that are appropriate to special days or seasons in the Christian calendar or specified themes of our life in Christ.

Believers have long been persuaded that a judicious combination of the two methods constitutes the best approach to reading Holy Scripture. If we were to use only the first method, for example, we might find that our Bible reading on Christmas or Easter concerned Samson’s various fights with the Philistines, making us wonder if this weren’t something of a distraction. So we pick specific readings suitable to those special days: *lectio selecta*. Similarly, if we constantly picked selections from the Bible and always read them apart from their contexts within the biblical canon, we would eventually lose touch with the integrity of the various biblical books as such. There is a distinct advantage in reading, say, the book of Genesis, or Daniel, or Mark straight through, in order to grasp it in its fullness: *lectio continua*.

## Our Method

The lectionary system used in this *Devotional Guide* employs both traditional methods. Moreover, the readings are arranged with certain goals in mind: (1) that some section of the Gospels be read every day; (2) that every part of the New Testament be read at least once every year; (3) that the entire Old Testament be read over each two-year period; (4) that readings of the Holy Scriptures occasionally be juxtaposed in order for them to throw light on one another; (5) that a certain respect be shown to the ancient lectionary traditions of the churches, according to which certain parts of Holy Scripture are normally read during certain seasons; and (6) that special consideration be given to the Book of Psalms as a normal component of daily Christian prayer. It will be useful to say a word or two on each of these points.

### *1. The Daily Gospel Reading*

The four Gospels have always enjoyed a certain preeminence in the Christian mind, because they concentrate on “the things that Jesus did and said” (Bernard of Clairvaux). “Surely everything our Savior did and said,” wrote John Henry Newman, “is characterized by mingled simplicity and mystery.” It is very significant that the word “Gospel,” which originally meant “the Christian message,” early—at least by the second century, long before the New Testament canon was formally determined—came to be applied to a specific type of literature, of which the New Testament contains four examples. If one has time for only one biblical reading each day, the prescribed section from the Gospels makes a special claim to be that reading. One may read the Gospel at any time during the day, but ancient custom assigns it to the morning. For consistency’s sake we habitually list it first. On a few days, especially in festal seasons, we give two readings from the Gospels.

### *2. The New Testament Readings*

Before any of the four Gospels was written, most of the apostolic epistles were already widespread and well known. Beginning with First Thessalonians about the year 50, these letters were read within the regular weekly assemblies of Christians. They were copied and sent from church to church. To these were added, in due course, the books of Revelation (which also contains seven apostolic letters) and the Acts of the Apostles. The claim of this literature on the Christian mind is just as strong today as it was then.

### *3. The Old Testament Readings*

Exclusive of the Book of Psalms, the Hebrew Scriptures (which is the Old Testament canon among Protestant Christians) contains 757 chapters. At one chapter each day, a reader will finish 730 chapters over a two-year period. (The remaining 27 chapters will be distributed in other parts of the lectionary.) This “daily chapter” will be the longest reading each day and may be done whenever convenient. As opportunity permits, there will also be readings from those books found only in the Greek Old Testament. In Protestant Bibles these books are known as the Apocrypha; in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, these books do not form a separate section but are spread throughout the entire text, intermixed with the other books.

#### *4. Juxtaposition of Biblical Texts*

Within the limits compatible with the three foregoing goals, certain readings will be chosen on certain days with a view to throwing light on some other reading assigned for that day. This method of reading Holy Scripture is amply justified within the New Testament itself, where both Jesus and the Apostles appeal to the Old Testament by way of instruction on some part of the Christian message. No firm rule will be used to determine these selected readings. Sometimes a Gospel reading or an Epistle will be chosen to accompany the “daily chapter,” sometimes another Old Testament text to accompany the Gospel sequence, sometimes a special insertion on a following day, etc.

#### *5. Seasonal Readings*

Even in pre-Christian times the Jews had perceived a propriety in reading certain biblical passages at particular times of the year. Thus, the Song of Solomon was read at Passover, and Ruth at Pentecost. Similarly, Christians have long been fond of reading Genesis during Lent, for example, Isaiah during Advent and the Christmas season, and the Gospel of John during the time of Easter. In our own lectionary some respect will be shown to such traditions about seasons and special days.

#### *6. The Psalms*

The Psalter is the Old Testament book most quoted in the New Testament and has been considered an essential, non-replaceable part of Christian prayer from the very beginning. Two sections from the Psalms are assigned for each day, one for morning and one for evening, mainly (but not slavishly) following the pattern outlined in *The Book of Common Prayer* currently used by the Episcopal Church.

#### **More Commentary**

Readers who would like to pursue the study of the assigned biblical texts more carefully are encouraged to consult our website ([www.touchstonemag.com/daily\\_reflections](http://www.touchstonemag.com/daily_reflections)), where they will find the “Daily Bible Reflections,” which offer more extensive and detailed comments on one of the assigned biblical readings for each day. Indeed, in order to provide sufficient space to publish new material in these pages, several of the standard introductions to various biblical books, already published in this *Daily Devotional Guide* in previous years, will be made available only at our web page. In each instance, this will be noted when appropriate.

## DECEMBER 3 – 9, 2017

*Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which Thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through Him who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost. Amen.*

### THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

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<b>S</b>	DECEMBER 3 <i>First Sunday of Advent</i>	Luke 20:27–40 Revelation 9:13–21 Psalms 146,147 † 111,112,113 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Esther 8
<b>M</b>	DECEMBER 4 <i>The Prophecy of Nahum (See p. 21)</i>	Luke 20:41–47 Esther 9:1–10:3 Psalms 1,2,3 † 4,7 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Nahum 1
<b>T</b>	DECEMBER 5 <i>A Murderous Plot</i>	Luke 21:1–6 Revelation 10:1–11 Psalms 5,6 † 10,11 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Nahum 2
<b>W</b>	DECEMBER 6 <i>The Two Witnesses</i>	Luke 21:7–19 Revelation 11:1–14 Psalms 119:1–24 † 12,13,14 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Nahum 3
<b>T</b>	DECEMBER 7 <i>Susannah &amp; Daniel (See p. 22)</i>	Luke 21:20–28 Revelation 11:15–19 Psalms 18:1–20 † 18:21–50 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Susannah
<b>F</b>	DECEMBER 8 <i>Two Signs in Heaven</i>	Luke 21:29–38 Revelation 12:1–17 Psalms 16,17 † 22 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 1
<b>S</b>	DECEMBER 9 <i>The Beast from the Sea</i>	Luke 22:1–6 Revelation 13:1–10 Psalms 20,21 † 110,116,117 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 2

## DECEMBER 10 – 16, 2017

*Merciful God, who sent Thy messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation; grant us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

### THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

S	DECEMBER 10	Luke 22:7–13
	<i>Second Sunday of Advent</i>	Revelation 13:11–18 Psalms 148,149,150 † 114,115 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 3
M	DECEMBER 11	Luke 22:14–23
	<i>The Lamb &amp; the Angels</i> (See p. 24)	Revelation 14:1–13 Psalms 25 † 9,15 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 4
T	DECEMBER 12	Luke 22:24–34
	<i>The Awful Harvest</i>	Revelation 14:14–20 Psalms 26,28 † 36,39 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 5
W	DECEMBER 13	Luke 22:35–38
	<i>The Judgments to Come</i>	Revelation 15:1–8 Psalms 38 † 119:25–48 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 6
T	DECEMBER 14	Luke 22:39–46
	<i>The First Three Bowls</i>	Revelation 16:1–7 Psalms 37:1–18 † 37:19–42 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 7
F	DECEMBER 15	Luke 1:1–25
	<i>Gabriel</i> (See p. 25)	Revelation 16:8–16 Psalms 31 † 35 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 8
S	DECEMBER 16	Luke 1:26–38
	<i>Gabriel Again</i>	Revelation 16:17–21 Psalms 30,32 † 42,43 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Daniel 9

## DECEMBER 17 – 23, 2017

*Stir up Thy power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let Thy bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be honor and glory, world without end. Amen.*

### THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

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S

DECEMBER 17  
*Gaudete*  
*Sunday*  
*(See p. 26)*

Luke 1:39–56  
Philippians 4:4–9  
Psalms 63,98 † 103  
*Daily Chapter:* Daniel 10

M

DECEMBER 18  
*The Woman*  
*& Her Beast*  
*(See p. 26)*

Luke 1:57–80  
Revelation 17:1–18  
Psalms 41,52 † 44  
*Daily Chapter:* Daniel 11

T

DECEMBER 19  
*The Fall of*  
*Babylon*

Luke 22:47–62  
Revelation 18:1–8  
Psalms 45 † 47,48  
*Daily Chapter:* Daniel 12

W

DECEMBER 20  
*Mourning*  
*over Babylon*

Luke 22:63–71  
Revelation 18:9–24  
Psalms 119:49–72 † 49,53  
*Daily Chapter:* Bel & the Dragon

T

DECEMBER 21  
*The Prophecy*  
*of Micah*  
*(See p. 28)*

Luke 23:1–25  
Revelation 19:1–10  
Psalms 50 † 59,60  
*Daily Chapter:* Micah 1

F

DECEMBER 22  
*The Mounted*  
*Warrior*

Luke 23:26–38  
Revelation 19:11–21  
Psalms 40,54 † 51  
*Daily Chapter:* Micah 2

S

DECEMBER 23  
*Satan Bound*

Luke 23:39–56  
Revelation 20:1–15  
Psalms 55 † 138,139  
*Daily Chapter:* Micah 3



## DECEMBER 24 – 30, 2017

*O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of Thy only Son Jesus Christ; grant that as we joyfully receive Him for our Redeemer, so may we with sure confidence behold Him when He shall come to be our Judge; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

### THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

S	DECEMBER 24 <i>Fourth Sunday of Advent</i>	Matthew 1:1–17 ( <i>See p. 28</i> ) Hebrews 1:1–14 ( <i>See p. 29</i> ) Psalms 45,46 † 89:1–29 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Micah 4
M	DECEMBER 25 <i>The Birth of Christ</i>	Luke 2:1–20 Hebrews 2:1–18 ( <i>See p. 30</i> ) Psalms 2,85 † 110,132 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Micah 5
T	DECEMBER 26 <i>St. Stephen (See p. 32)</i>	Matthew 1:18–25 Acts 6:8—8:3 Psalms 28,30 † 118 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Micah 6
W	DECEMBER 27 <i>St. John</i>	John 1:1–18 1 John 1:1–7 Psalms 97,98 † 145 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Micah 7
T	DECEMBER 28 <i>The Holy Innocents</i>	Matthew 2:16–23 Revelation 21:1–8 Psalms 2,26 † 19,126 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Obadiah ( <i>See p. 34</i> )
F	DECEMBER 29 <i>The Book of Deuteronomy (See p. 36)</i>	John 1:19–28 Revelation 21:9–27 Psalms 18:1–20 † 18:21–50 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 1
S	DECEMBER 30 <i>The River of Life</i>	John 1:29–34 Revelation 22:1–11 Psalms 20,21 † 23,27 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 2

# DECEMBER 31, 2017 — JANUARY 6, 2018

*Almighty and everlasting God, who hast made known the Incarnation of Thy Word by the testimony of a glorious star, which when the wise men beheld, they adored Thy majesty with gifts; grant that the star of Thy righteousness may always appear in our hearts, and our treasure consist in giving thanks to Thee. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## THE GELASIAN SACRAMENTARY

S	DECEMBER 31	Matthew 25:31–46
	<i>The End</i>	Revelation 22:12–21
	<i>of History</i>	Psalms 46,48 † 90
		<i>Daily Chapter: Deuteronomy 3</i>
M	JANUARY 1	Luke 2:21
	<i>The</i>	Hebrews 3:1–11
	<i>Circumcision</i>	Psalms 103 † 148
	<i>of Christ</i>	<i>Daily Chapter: Deuteronomy 4</i>
T	JANUARY 2	John 1:35–51
	<i>The Desert</i>	Hebrews 3:12–19
	<i>Years</i>	Psalms 34 † 33
		<i>Daily Chapter: Deuteronomy 5</i>
W	JANUARY 3	Matthew 3:1–12
	<i>The Promised</i>	Hebrews 4:1–10
	<i>Sabbath</i>	Psalms 68,95 † 72
		<i>Daily Chapter: Deuteronomy 6</i>
T	JANUARY 4	Luke 3:1–6
	<i>The High</i>	Hebrews 4:11—5:4
	<i>Priest</i>	Psalms 85,87 † 89:1–29
		<i>Daily Chapter: Deuteronomy 7</i>
F	JANUARY 5	Luke 3:7–20
	<i>John</i>	Hebrews 5:5–14
	<i>Preaches</i>	Psalms 2,110 † 29,98
		<i>Daily Chapter: Deuteronomy 8</i>
S	JANUARY 6	Matthew 2:1–15
	<i>The Feast of</i>	Luke 3:21–22
	<i>the Epiphany</i>	Psalms 46,97 † 96,100
	<i>(See p. 37)</i>	<i>Daily Chapter: Deuteronomy 9</i>

## JANUARY 7 – 13, 2018

*Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, as we are bathed in the new light of Thine incarnate Word, that what shines by faith in our minds may also blaze out in our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### THE GREGORIAN SACRAMENTARY

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S

JANUARY 7  
*First Sunday  
After Epiphany*

Matthew 3:13–17  
John 2:1–12  
Psalms 146,147 † 111,112,113  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 10

M

JANUARY 8  
*The Epistle  
to Titus  
(See p. 37)*

Matthew 4:12–17  
Titus 1:1–16  
Psalms 1,2,3 † 4,7  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 11

T

JANUARY 9  
*Beginning  
the Ministry*

Matthew 4:18–25  
Titus 2:1–15  
Psalms 5,6 † 10,11  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 12

W

JANUARY 10  
*The  
Beatitudes*

Matthew 5:1–12  
Titus 3:1–15  
Psalms 119:1–24 † 12,13,14  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 13

T

JANUARY 11  
*Fidelity  
to a Pledge*

Matthew 5:13–20  
Hebrews 6:1–12  
Psalms 18:1–20 † 18:21–50  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 14

F

JANUARY 12  
*God's Promise  
in Christ*

Matthew 5:21–30  
Hebrews 6:13–20  
Psalms 16,17 † 22  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 15

S

JANUARY 13  
*Without  
Begats  
(See p. 39)*

Matthew 5:31–37  
Hebrews 7:1–10  
Psalms 20,21 † 110,116,117  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 16

## JANUARY 14 – 20, 2018

*Grant, almighty God, that we may be able continually to shake off the yoke of Egyptian servitude and sin, and to appear before Thy majesty in our heavenly country; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### AMBROSIAN COLLECT

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**S** JANUARY 14      John 2:13–25  
*Second Sunday*      Hebrews 7:11–28  
*After Epiphany*      Psalms 148,149,150 † 114,115  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 17

**M** JANUARY 15      Matthew 5:38–42  
*The True*      Hebrews 8:1–6  
*Tabernacle*      Psalms 25 † 9,15  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 18

**T** JANUARY 16      Matthew 5:43—6:4  
*The New*      Hebrews 8:7–13  
*Covenant*      Psalms 26,28 † 36,39  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 19

**W** JANUARY 17      Matthew 6:5–15  
*The Sanctuary*      Hebrews 9:1–10  
*on Earth*      Psalms 38 † 119:25–48  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 20

**T** JANUARY 18      Matthew 6:19–34  
*The Mystery*      Hebrews 9:11–15  
*of the Blood*      Psalms 37:1–18 † 37:19–42  
*(See p. 40)*      *Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 21

**F** JANUARY 19      Matthew 7:1–6  
*The Death of*      Hebrews 9:16–22  
*the Mediator*      Psalms 31 † 35  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 22

**S** JANUARY 20      Matthew 7:7–12  
*The Sacrifice*      Hebrews 9:23–28  
*of Christ*      Psalms 30,32 † 42,43  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 23

# JANUARY 21 – 27, 2018

*O Christ, Word of the Father most high, who wast made flesh to dwell among us, enter Thou into our hearts, we beseech Thee, that we who have been redeemed by the mystery of Thine Incarnation, may remain united in the communion of peace eternal.*

## MOZARABIC COLLECT

S	JANUARY 21 <i>Third Sunday After Epiphany</i>	Matthew 7:13–23 Hebrews 10:1–10 Psalms 63,98 † 103 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 24
M	JANUARY 22 <i>Christ's Heavenly Sacrifice</i>	Matthew 7:24–29 Hebrews 10:11–18 Psalms 41,52 † 44 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 25
T	JANUARY 23 <i>Maintaining the Pledge</i>	Matthew 8:1–4 Hebrews 10:19–25 Psalms 45 † 47,48 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 26
W	JANUARY 24 <i>Living by Faith</i>	Matthew 8:5–13 Hebrews 10:26–31 Psalms 119:49–72 † 49,53 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 27
T	JANUARY 25 <i>Recall the Former Days</i>	Matthew 8:14–17 Hebrews 10:32–39 Psalms 50 † 59,60 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 28
F	JANUARY 26 <i>Abel, Enoch &amp; Noah (See p. 41)</i>	Matthew 8:18–22 Hebrews 11:1–7 Psalms 40,54 † 51 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 29
S	JANUARY 27 <i>"These All Died"</i>	Matthew 8:23–27 Hebrews 11:8–16 Psalms 55 † 138,139 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Deuteronomy 30

# JANUARY 28 — FEBRUARY 3, 2018

*Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that we who seek the grace of Thy protection, being delivered from all evils, may serve Thee in quietness of mind. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## LEONINE COLLECT

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**S** JANUARY 28 Matthew 8:28–34  
*Fourth Sunday* Hebrews 11:17–29  
*After Epiphany* Psalms 24,29 † 8,84  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 31

**M** JANUARY 29 Matthew 9:1–9  
*More* Hebrews 11:30–40  
*Champions* Psalms 56,57,58 † 64,65  
*of Faith* *Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 32

**T** JANUARY 30 Matthew 9:10–13  
*Holy* Hebrews 12:1–11  
*Discipline* Psalms 61,62 † 68  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 33

**W** JANUARY 31 Matthew 9:14–17  
*Esau, No* Hebrews 12:12–17  
*Fit Example* Psalms 72 † 119:73–96  
*Daily Chapter:* Deuteronomy 34

**T** FEBRUARY 1 Matthew 9:18–26  
*Jeremiah:* Hebrews 12:18–29  
*Oracles,* Psalms 70,71 † 74  
*Sermons, Stories* *Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 1 (*See p. 43*)

**F** FEBRUARY 2 Luke 2:22–40  
*Presenting the* Haggai 2:1–9  
*First-Born* Psalms 42,43 † 48,87  
*(See p. 45)* *Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 2

**S** FEBRUARY 3 Luke 2:41–52  
*Moral* Hebrews 13:1–17  
*Directives* Psalms 75,76 † 23,27  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 3

## FEBRUARY 4 – 10, 2018

*Look mercifully, O Good Shepherd, on Thy flock; and suffer not the sheep that Thou hast redeemed by Thy precious blood to be torn to pieces by the assaults of the devil. For in Thy holy name we pray. Amen.*

### LEONINE/SARUM COLLECT

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S

FEBRUARY 4  
*Fifth Sunday  
After Epiphany*

Matthew 9:27–38  
Hebrews 13:18–25  
Psalms 93,96 † 34  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 4

M

FEBRUARY 5  
*The Epistle to  
the Romans  
(See p. 45)*

Matthew 10:1–15  
Romans 1:1–17  
Psalms 80 † 77,79  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 5

T

FEBRUARY 6  
*The  
Manifestation  
of Wrath*

Matthew 10:16–26  
Romans 1:18–32  
Psalms 78:1–39 † 78:40–72  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 6

W

FEBRUARY 7  
*God's  
Righteous  
Judgment*

Matthew 10:27–31  
Romans 2:1–16  
Psalms 119:97–120 † 81,82  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 7

T

FEBRUARY 8  
*Everybody  
Guilty*

Matthew 10:32–42  
Romans 2:17–29  
Psalms 83 † 85,86  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 8

F

FEBRUARY 9  
*The Jewish  
Advantage*

Matthew 11:1–19  
Romans 3:1–8  
Psalms 88 † 91,92  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 9

S

FEBRUARY 10  
*All Have  
Sinned*

Matthew 11:20–24  
Romans 3:9–20  
Psalms 87,90 † 136  
*Daily Chapter:* Jeremiah 10

## FEBRUARY 11 – 17, 2018

*We beseech Thee, O Lord, mercifully to correct our wanderings, and by the guiding radiance of Thy compassion to bring us to the salutary vision of Thy truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### THE GOTHIC MISSAL

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S	FEBRUARY 11 <i>Last Sunday After Epiphany</i>	Matthew 11:25–30 Romans 3:21–31 Psalms 148,149,150 † 114,115 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 11
M	FEBRUARY 12 <i>David &amp; Abraham</i>	Matthew 12:1–8 Romans 4:1–12 Psalms 25 † 9,15 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 12
T	FEBRUARY 13 <i>Faith &amp; the Promise</i>	Matthew 12:9–14 Romans 4:13–25 Psalms 26,28 † 36,39 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 13
W	FEBRUARY 14 <i>Ash Wednesday (See p. 46)</i>	Matthew 6:1–18 Joel 1:13—2:2 Psalms 95,32,143 † 102,130 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 14
T	FEBRUARY 15 <i>The True Sin Offering</i>	Matthew 12:15–21 Romans 5:1–11 Psalms 37:1–18 † 37:19–42 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 15
F	FEBRUARY 16 <i>The Legacy of Adam</i>	Matthew 12:22–30 Romans 5:12–21 Psalms 95,31 † 35 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 16
S	FEBRUARY 17 <i>Alive to God</i>	Matthew 12:31–37 Romans 6:1–14 Psalms 30,32 † 42,43 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 17



## FEBRUARY 18 – 24, 2018

*Lord Jesus Christ, who for the redemption of the world didst ascend the wood of the cross, that Thou mightest enlighten the whole world that lay in darkness; pour that light, we pray Thee, into our hearts and bodies, whereby we may be enabled to the light eternal, O Thou who livest and reignest with the Father and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

### THE SARUM MISSAL

S	FEBRUARY 18 <i>The First Sunday of Lent</i>	Matthew 4:1–11 Romans 6:15–23 Psalms 63,98 † 103 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 18
M	FEBRUARY 19 <i>Deliverance from the Law</i>	Matthew 12:38–42 Romans 7:1–6 Psalms 41,52 † 44 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 19
T	FEBRUARY 20 <i>The Frailty of the Law</i>	Matthew 12:43–50 Romans 7:7–12 Psalms 45 † 47,48 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 20
W	FEBRUARY 21 <i>The Inner Conflict</i>	Matthew 13:1–9 Romans 7:13–25 Psalms 119:49–72 † 49,53 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 21
T	FEBRUARY 22 <i>The Bondage of Sin</i>	Matthew 13:10–17 Romans 8:1–11 Psalms 50 † 59,60 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 22
F	FEBRUARY 23 <i>The Spirit of Sonship</i>	Matthew 13:18–23 Romans 8:12–17 Psalms 95,40,54 † 51 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 23
S	FEBRUARY 24 <i>The Spirit's Groaning</i>	Matthew 13:24–30 Romans 8:18–30 Psalms 55 † 138,139 <i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 24

## FEBRUARY 25 — MARCH 3, 2018

*Inflame our hearts with love for Thee, O Christ our God, that loving Thee with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our neighbors as ourselves, we may obey Thy commandments and glorify Thee, the Giver of all good gifts. Amen.*

### EASTERN ORTHODOX PRAYER

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S	<p>FEBRUARY 25</p> <p><i>Second Sunday of Lent</i></p>	<p>Matthew 13:31–35</p> <p>Romans 8:31–39</p> <p>Psalms 24,29 † 8,84</p> <p><i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 25</p>
M	<p>FEBRUARY 26</p> <p><i>Israel's Defection</i></p>	<p>Matthew 13:36–43</p> <p>Romans 9:1–13</p> <p>Psalms 56,57,58 † 64,65</p> <p><i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 26</p>
T	<p>FEBRUARY 27</p> <p><i>Treasures (See p. 47)</i></p>	<p>Matthew 13:44–52</p> <p>Romans 9:14–26</p> <p>Psalms 61,62 † 68</p> <p><i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 27</p>
W	<p>FEBRUARY 28</p> <p><i>Rejection at Nazareth</i></p>	<p>Matthew 13:53–58</p> <p>Romans 9:27–33</p> <p>Psalms 72 † 119:73–96</p> <p><i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 28</p>
T	<p>MARCH 1</p> <p><i>The Death of the Baptist (See p. 47)</i></p>	<p>Matthew 14:1–12</p> <p>Romans 10:1–13</p> <p>Psalms 70,71 † 74</p> <p><i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 29</p>
F	<p>MARCH 2</p> <p><i>Bread in the Desert</i></p>	<p>Matthew 14:13–21</p> <p>Romans 10:14–21</p> <p>Psalms 95,69 † 73</p> <p><i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 30</p>
S	<p>MARCH 3</p> <p><i>Walking on Water</i></p>	<p>Matthew 14:22–36</p> <p>Romans 11:1–10</p> <p>Psalms 75,76 † 23,27</p> <p><i>Daily Chapter:</i> Jeremiah 31</p>

# PRAYERS FOR WINTER

*Prayers in light of the ministry of salvation*

*These intercessions can be used for general prayer and meditation or augmented with more specific and personal petitions.*

Heavenly Father, you sent your Son to be the Light of the world and bring salvation to all. We offer now our prayers and intercessions for the needs of all and the progress of your gospel; and so we pray: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For the oppressed, the afflicted, and suffering of the world, that He who looks upon his children with compassion may impart peace, health, and salvation, we pray: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For those who do not believe, and those who have fallen away, that a saving faith may be kindled in their hearts, we pray: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For the peace of our troubled world and all her people, that evil and violence may be restrained, and that peace and justice may prevail, we pray: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For all those who govern our country and our city, that they may govern with wisdom in these troubled times, with compassion for those in need, and with justice for all, we pray: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For the holy catholic Church, that she may be faithful to the gospel, and manifest the Light of Jesus Christ to all men through her good works and in all her teaching, we pray: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For our community and all our people, that God would bless us, keep us, and watch over us, that we may fulfill his will and obtain his good favor, we pray: *Lord, hear our prayer.*

## A SHORTER PETITION

*It is suggested that besides offering up such intercessions at one point in the day (whether morning or evening), it is good to pray correspondingly at the other time of day a prayer like the following:*

Heavenly Father, show us your mercy and grant us your salvation. Bless and keep your Church in all righteousness. Give peace, O Lord, in all the world, and keep this nation under your care. Let not the needy be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor taken away; in Christ's name we pray. *Amen.*

# CLOSING PRAYERS

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

And now, O Lord, give us the grace to pray confidently in the words our Savior taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.  
For Thine is the kingdom, and the power,  
and the glory, for ever. *Amen.*

## CONCLUDING PRAYER

O Lord, watch over us and grant us Your grace that we may grow in the knowledge of Your only Son, and may one day behold Him in the glory of the heavenly kingdom, full of grace and truth, in whose name we pray. *Amen.*

[*or*]

O God, may we manifest Jesus Christ in all that we do. Guide us and protect us that we may come at last into the glory of Your presence, being found well-pleasing in Your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. *Amen.*

## BENEDICTION

*To end Morning Prayer:*

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort our hearts and establish them in every good work and word; to whom be glory for ever.

*To end Evening Prayer:*

May the God of peace sanctify us wholly; and may our spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever.

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

# NOTES—WINTER 2017–2018

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## December 4. The Prophecy of Nahum

**I**n at least one respect, Nahum is unique in all the Bible—what he announced was exactly what his contemporaries most wanted to hear! Most biblical prophets, after all, are “countervailing.” That is to say, most of the time we find them resisting, even denouncing, the popular mind of their day. They usually speak in a direction about 180 degrees at variance with the temper of their times.

Thus, if God’s people are content and self-satisfied, the biblical prophets step in and give them something to worry about. If, on the other hand, God’s people are depressed and weary, the prophets’ word to them is normally encouraging and full of promise. In short, the word of the prophet is most often just the opposite of what the people are disposed to hear, a feature that tends to render the prophet a tad unpopular in his own time. It is easy to show that this countervailing disposition rules in most of the Bible’s prophetic books.

Not in the Book of Nahum, however. His was a word that all expected and no Israelites were sad to hear! Shortly before the fall of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, in 612, Nahum announced its coming destruction in the most vivid terms, to the universal jubilation of his listeners. Assyria, after all, was the scourge of its time. Ever since its rise a few centuries earlier, the empire ruled from Nineveh had inflicted countless sufferings across the Fertile Crescent. As prophesied by Amos, the Assyrians under Emperor Sargon II had conquered the Kingdom of Israel in 722, carrying away the ten northern tribes to a bitter captivity, and other nations of the Middle East suffered an identical fate.

Moreover, the Assyrians destroyed the Phoenician capital of Tyre and conquered the Nile Delta. Meanwhile, the nations of Judah, Syria, Ammon, Moab, and Edom were held under Assyrian subjection and tribute. Only a miraculous intervention had preserved Jerusalem itself from destruction by the Emperor Sennacherib. It is not surprising that the Assyrians were thoroughly and roundly hated throughout the lands of the Bible. We recall with what reluctance the Prophet Jonah had preached repentance to the Ninevites back in the eighth century, for he did not want them to repent!

By the beginning of the seventh century, nonetheless, a new empire was rising to challenge Assyria—namely, a rejuvenated Babylon. Perhaps the latter power seemed harmless at first. We recall that King Hezekiah of Judah, late in his reign, received a Babylonian delegation, foolishly show-

ing them the treasures of his kingdom, never suspecting that these Babylonians would soon return to claim that treasure. Isaiah, however, a keen interpreter of his times, foresaw it all.

Neither in the Bible nor in other ancient records is it made clear exactly how the Assyrian Empire arrived at the decline that marked its existence by the mid-seventh century, though one suspects that it had simply grown too large to be manageable. More than one empire in history has been taught the danger of having too many borders to defend. In 614, when combined forces of Babylonians and Medes destroyed Assyria's older capital, the city of Ashur, the Prophet Nahum sensed that the end of its newer capital, Nineveh, was not far off. The three chapters of his prophecies should be dated between 614 and 612.

Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, was a most impressive city for that time. Its containing wall was eight miles long and embraced about 1,850 acres, or 2.89 square miles. It was full of palaces built by Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal. Its temples to Ishtar and Nabu were world famous. It was full of wealth drawn from the whole region between Egypt and the Persian Gulf. Most Assyrians may have thought that the empire and its capital would last forever. Not so, said Nahum, going on to describe Nineveh's impending destruction in very colorful scenes that depict the scarlet tunics of the invading armies, the rumbling of horses' hooves and chariot wheels, the brandishing of spears, and the flaming torches put to the buildings. In short, "Woe to the bloody city!" (Nahum 3:1).

Such a fate, says Nahum, must hang over every nation that rebels against the rule of God, for "who can stand before his indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of his anger?" (1:6).

Later this month, the observant reader will detect Nahum's sentiments towards Nineveh in John's description of the fall of Babylon in the Book of Revelation.

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## December 7. Susannah & Daniel

**I**n the Scriptures as transmitted by the Jews, the Book of Daniel follows immediately after the Book of Esther. This book, preserved in Aramaic as the manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures have come down to us, begins with the account of the young Israelite captives who served in the Babylonian court.

Our oldest Greek manuscripts of the Book of Daniel, however, commence with another story, in which the Prophet Daniel is still quite young. This story, assigned for our reading today, tells of his intervention to save a young woman, Susannah, who has been falsely accused and condemned to death.

Until Martin Luther's reform of the Sacred Text in the sixteenth century, most Christians read the story of Daniel with the account of Susannah included. Was this inclusion justified? After all, it is not contained in any of the seven Semitic copies of Daniel discovered among the Dead Sea scrolls at Qumran. Moreover, the story is found neither in Josephus in the first century nor in the second-century translation of the Hebrew Scriptures by the Jew Aquila. We have the further witness of Jerome speaking of a Jewish critic who considered the story a piece of Greek fiction.

Most Christians at the time disagreed with Jerome. For instance, Hippolytus in Rome and Origen in Egypt were perhaps speaking for a common Christian view in the third century when they advanced a rather simple explanation. The reason that the story of Susannah had not been included in that canon, they said, was that the latter was established by Jewish elders who would not look favorably on a narrative that made villains of two of their number!

Christian readers have been particularly impressed that Susannah, when falsely accused, spoke not a word to defend herself. Moreover, in one manuscript tradition of the story, she did not even raise her voice in prayer until after her condemnation. Rather, she prayed silently during her accusation and trial. As she was being accused, the text says, she simply "looked up with tears to heaven, because her heart trusted in the Lord." "By her tears," wrote Hippolytus in the third century, "she drew the Word from heaven, who himself was with tears able to raise the dead Lazarus." As Origen observed, this devout gesture of Susannah is graced with a great literary irony, for it is to be contrasted with the description of her two lustful accusers: "Thus they perverted their own minds and turned away their eyes from looking up to heaven, and they rendered not just judgments."

With respect to this book as a whole, we should observe that is not contained in the prophetic books (*nebi'im*) of the Hebrew Scriptures; it is found, rather, in that canon's final section, the "Writings" (*ketubim*). Apparently not everyone in antiquity was agreed on the book's authority. Although Josephus says that a copy of Daniel was shown to Alexander the Great (*Antiquities* 11.8.5), Ben Sirach, writing early in the second century before Christ, did not include Daniel with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets (*Ecclesiasticus* 44–50). The decision to include Daniel in the Holy Scriptures, therefore, was made some time after the canon of the prophetic writings was closed. Thus, to be included in the Bible at all, it had to be placed in the final section, the "Writings."

The Prophet Daniel, already active in the year 603 (2:1), was still going strong in 536 (10:1). A fearless man, not intimidated by lions' dens and other petty threats, he served the Babylonian and Persian emperors

during that whole period, all the while remaining a devout and loyal Jew. He resembled the ancient Joseph, who had served in the royal court of Egypt. The kings in both cases gave these two servants special clothing to signify their status (Gen. 41:42; Dan. 5:29).

Daniel also matched Joseph in the interpretation of dreams, a gift in which both men were contrasted to the pagan soothsayers (compare Genesis 41 and Daniel 4). Both Joseph and Daniel, moreover, had revelatory dreams of their own (Gen. 37:5–10; Dan. 7–8).

Although several of the prophets recorded their visions (Ezekiel preeminently), proportionately more of the text of Daniel is taken up with visionary material than is the case with any other biblical writer except the author of the Book of Revelation.

Daniel was a man of disciplined devotion, who regularly went before the Lord three times each day in prayer and thanksgiving (6:10). Since one of those times was the hour of the evening sacrifice (9:21), we may presume that the other two were at the hour of the morning sacrifice and at noon (cf. Ps. 55:17). Daniel is thus among our earliest witnesses to the keeping of the “canonical” hours of prayer, a discipline taken over by the early Christians without separation from their Jewish roots (cf. Acts 1:14 with 2:1,15; 3:1; 10:3,9,30).

The contemplative and visionary aspects of Daniel’s devotion, though certainly divine gifts, were also the fruit of his sustained application to the discipline of prayer. He set his heart to understand and to humble himself before God (10:12). A man “in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God,” a man of “knowledge and understanding” (5:11–12), Daniel did not falter. He was no more likely to omit his daily prayer from fear of the lions than for any other trifling reason (6:11–17). This fidelity was the secret to his life and vocation.

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## December 11. The Lamb & the Angels

**N**ow we come again to the sealing of the followers of Christ, first spoken of in Chapter 7. With respect to the “following” of the Lamb (verse 4), of course, the image is found also in the Gospels. When Jesus calls on his disciples to “follow” him, the context is the Cross. The Lamb to be followed is the Lamb of sacrifice (Mark 8:34–38; John 21:18–19). There are three angels in this text, representing three dimensions of the final age, the proclamation of the gospel, the judgment of God on the city of man, and the eternal, wrathful exclusion of idolatry.

First, the angel of the everlasting gospel (verse 6), whose mandate, like the mandate at the end of Matthew, is directed to all nations. These are all called to repentance and conversion to the true God (verse 7; cf.



Acts 14:15). Remember that in John's view, the judgment of God is *now*. The judgment of God takes place in the very proclamation of the Good News (cf. John 3:19; 18:37). The gospel here is called eternal; it is the proclamation of the eternal mind of God, his eternal purpose of salvation, the "Mystery" of which the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks.

Second, the angel who proclaims the fall of Babylon (verse 8). This, too, pertains to the gospel. In biblical thought, the fall of Babylon means that the true Israelites can now go home, because the exile is over. Babylon is whatever enslaves and alienates the people of God. Babylon is the city of false gods, the city that dares to raise up its tower against the face of God; it is the monument to man's achievements without God. Babylon is the city where men do not understand one another, because each man, as it were, speaks his own private meaning. The downfall of this city certainly is Good News, which is the meaning of the word "gospel." Christians are called to *leave* Babylon (18:4).

Third, the angel who proclaims the eschatological outpouring of God's wrath, to the exclusion of all idolatry (verses 9–11). This text is important because, like certain sayings of our Lord in the Gospels, it insists on the eternity of damnation. Unlike many modern men, the Bible believes that the definitive choice of evil lasts forever.

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## December 15. Gabriel

Daniel's visions and revelations now introduce the mysterious figure of Gabriel, whose name is accurately translated as "my strength (*Gabri*) is God (*El*)."<sup>1</sup> This high angelic being is the servant sent as a messenger from God. He appears "like a man"—*kēmar'eh geber* (8:15). (We note the specifically male reference of the noun "man," *geber*, a cognate of Gabriel's own name.) He wakes Daniel from a deep sleep (8:18), and for days afterwards the prophet is sick and exhausted from the vision and its revelation (8:27). In the following chapter, Gabriel will appear as Daniel is praying; he gives the prophet wisdom and understanding as an answer to prayer (9:20–27).

In our Gospel reading of the day, Gabriel returns, this time to Zachary, the priest assigned to offer incense in the temple while the people prayed (Luke 1:10). Zachary makes a big mistake. Messengers coming from the immediate presence of the divine Throne are not safely challenged, and this priest should have known better. Apparently, such angels are given some latitude in dealing with presumptuous priests, and Gabriel brings him up short: "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God." Too late Zachary learns the identity of this visitor to the temple. For his presumption, he is struck speechless for the next nine months and eight days, and

is thus given an opportunity to ponder the serious nature of his offense. During the time of the gestation, his wife, Elizabeth, will enjoy the peace and quiet in their home, as Zachary must keep his mouth shut, spending the time pondering the ways of God.

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## December 17. Gaudete Sunday

**O**n this Sunday, the traditional Epistle reading is from Philippians, exactly as suggested here in the *Devotional Guide*. Its title, *Gaudete*, means “Rejoice!” And why rejoice? Because “the Lord is near,” Paul tells the Philippians. Rejoice, then, because there are only eight more days until Christmas! In many congregations, this note of rejoicing prompted the custom of replacing the season’s purple with a softer rose color in the vestments and the adornment of the sanctuary on this day.

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## December 18. The Woman & Her Beast

**J**ohn’s vision of the woman on the scarlet beast is better understood if one bears in mind certain features of his cultural and religious memory:

First, Israel’s prophetic tradition had fought against ritual prostitution, one of the standard religious practices of Canaanite religion, which Israel’s prophets for centuries struggled to replace. This tradition frequently spoke of idolatry under the metaphor of fornication, a metaphor further suggested by the prophetic perception of Israel as bound to God by a spiritual marriage. This perception is well documented in two prophets of the eighth century, Hosea and Isaiah.

Second, a century earlier Elijah had opposed the immoral cult of Baal, which was sponsored by the Phoenician princess Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. For this reason, Jezebel came to personify, in Israel’s memory, the witch, the wicked woman of loose morals. As in the instance of Naboth’s vineyard, as well as the death of many prophets, she was also remembered as a woman responsible for the shedding of innocent blood; Elijah complained that she had put a price on his own head. All of this has been on John’s mind; he has already described a certain woman at Thyatira as a Jezebel (2:20–23). The memory of Jezebel is certainly part of the picture of John’s image of the woman on the scarlet beast.

Third, Israel’s wisdom tradition, especially as found in the Book of Proverbs, spoke of Wisdom as a man’s true bride, in intimacy with whom he was to spend his whole life. Opposed to this bridal wisdom was the “loose woman,” Dame Folly, personified in the prostitute. This opposition undoubtedly arose from the simple observation that a good marriage to the right woman teaches a man, if he is teachable, how to conduct his life

well and wisely, whereas that same man is brought to ruin if he consorts with a meretricious woman. The whore, then, was as bad a figure in Israel's wisdom literature as she is in the prophetic literature.

Fourth, John seems also influenced by certain infamous and profligate women in the more recent history with which he was familiar. In the previous century, for example, there had been the famous femme fatale, Cleopatra, while in his own lifetime John knew of Herodias, whose success in murdering John the Baptist surpassed even Jezebel's efforts against Elijah.

Even more recent to John's time there was Berenice, the daughter born to Herod the Great in A.D. 28. If any woman of John's era could be seen as a whore of international fame, it was Berenice, of whose activities we know chiefly from the historian Josephus. By the year 48 she had been widowed twice, once from her own brother, to whom she bore two children. For several years she lived in incest with another brother, Agrippa II, in whose company we find her at the trial of St. Paul in Acts 25:13,22-23; 26:30.

Shortly after this, Berenice was married to King Polemo of Cilicia, but she did not stay long with him. During this period of her life she was mocked by the poet Juvenal (*Satires* 6). Later on, according to Tacitus (*Histories* 2.2) and Suetonius (*Lives of the Caesars*, "Titus" 7), she was the mistress of Titus, who was obliged to abandon her in order to become emperor; Dio Cassius tells us (66.15). When John described a "loose woman," in short, none of his readers were at a loss to know what sort of woman he had in mind.

Fifth, the woman in this vision is the personification of the city of Rome, sitting on her seven hills. John did not have to personify Rome; it was already done by Rome's political endorsement of the goddess "Roma," in whose honor John knew of temples at Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos. In the east, Roma had also been assimilated with certain local and traditional fertility goddesses.

The woman here is not only a whore; she is also a drinker of innocent blood, in the tradition of Jezebel and Herodias, the latter remembered especially in the Asian churches as the one responsible for the death of their beloved John the Baptist. Clothed in scarlet and adorned with gold, she appears as a sort of queen, whom John calls Babylon, much in the style of Jeremiah 51:12-17, a text that should be read in connection with John's vision.

The seven hills in this vision certainly refer to the city of Rome, the *urbs septicollis*, as Suetonius called it (*The Lives of the Caesars* "Domitian" 5). Classical literature is full of references to this topographical feature of the city (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.783; *Georgics* 2.535; Horace, *Odes* 7; Ovid,

*Tristia* 1.5.69; Martial, *Spectacles* 4.64; Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 6.5). In short, “the woman you saw is that great city.”

But when the angel goes on to identify the heads with seven kings, the identification is less clear. Various speculations are possible in this respect. For instance, if we count Julius Caesar as the first emperor instead of Augustus, then the sixth “head” would be Nero, whom we know to have been a persecutor of the Christian Church. It is not necessary to be quite so literal, however; it may be the case that “seven” here is to be taken as a symbol for the whole, much as the seven churches of Asia are symbolic of the whole Church. (After all, there were certainly more than seven Christian churches in Asia at the time. There was the church at Colossae, for instance, to which St. Paul wrote an epistle.)

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## December 21. The Prophecy of Micah

**T**he opening verse of this book indicates that the author was a contemporary of Isaiah, in the second half of the eighth century before Christ. Like that more notable contemporary, Micah wrote as a social critic.

He differs from Isaiah, nonetheless, in representing a more *rural* and agricultural setting (like Amos, another contemporary, in this respect). Living outside the larger cities, which were centers of financial, mercantile, and political power, Micah shows an ardent concern for the poor and less fortunate Israelites who were his immediate, countryside neighbors. As the first verse shows, his words of prophetic invective were directed at the centers of power in the capital cities of Israel and Judah.

Indeed, Micah is the first prophet to foretell the downfall of Jerusalem. Unlike Isaiah, for whom Jerusalem was the “city of David,” Micah reserves this title for the little village of Bethlehem. His most famous prophecy about Bethlehem, in chapter 5, we will read very soon, on Christmas Day (cf. Matthew 2:5–6).

Moreover, the Messiah himself cites Micah’s observation, “a man’s enemies will be those of his own household” (7:6; Matthew 10:36).

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## December 24. The Gospel According to Matthew

**T**his Gospel, which shows some signs of an Aramaic original, or at least of reflecting a more Semitic background generally, seems to come from a Jewish-Christian church in Syria. Probably to be dated between A.D. 70 and 85, it reflects the definitive separation between Christians and official Judaism that took place during that time. In general, there is more attention given to the explicit teaching of Jesus in Matthew than in Mark, but the narratives of Jesus’ miracles are told in less detail and with

less dramatic color. Jesus appears very much the authoritative, divine Lawgiver in this Gospel.

Matthew's account is structured chiefly by five large discourses that commentators are probably right to see as related to the "five books" (Pentateuch) of Moses. In addition, there are the teachings of John the Baptist near the beginning and the Great Commission at the end.

We shall be reading Matthew well into the spring.

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## December 24. Hebrews 1:1–14

Today, which is at once the Fourth Sunday of Advent *and* Christmas Eve, we read the prologue of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It commences by recording that God, prior to sending his Son, spoke in earlier times through the prophets, some of whom we have been reading during this season.

The historical perspective here is identical to that of the parable of the vine growers, which is found in each of the three synoptic Gospels. In both cases the sending of the Son comes as the climax of a lengthy series of diverse missions dispatched to the vineyard. The former sending of the "prophets" in Hebrews corresponds to the repeated efforts of the Lord of the vineyard to gain the attention of the vine growers, who rejected the messengers, "beating some and killing some" (Mark 12:5).

In both instances, there is an emphasis on how *often* God made those overtures. The first three words in Hebrews, *polymeros kai polytropos*, are better rendered with some attention to the repeated prefix *poly-*, which indicates "many." The "at many times and in many ways" of the English Standard Version accomplishes this. The sense of repetition is also found in the Gospel parable. Several servants are sent, indeed "many" (*pol-lous*—Mark 12:5), even "more than the first" (*pleionas ton proton*—Matthew 21:36).

In this historical sequence, the Son comes "last" (*eschatos*). Mark's version (12:6) reads, "Last of all he sent his beloved Son" (*hyion agape-ton . . . apesteilen auton eschaton*). Hebrews, likewise, says that God "has in the last of these days (*ep' eschatou ton hemeron touton*) spoken to us by a Son (*en hyio*)."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the sending of the Son, both in the Gospel parable and in Hebrews, is God's eschatological act (cf. also Galatians 4:4), bringing Old Testament history to a dramatic climax in the Son's redemptive death and Resurrection.

This historical approach to Christology is important. Even before speaking of the eternity of God's Son ("the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person"), the author first relates that Son to the message conveyed "in time past unto the fathers by the prophets." The

Son of God proclaimed in this work is also a human being. More specifically, in fact, he is a Jew. This Son not only became man; he also became a Jew. His experience as a human being—all those things identified as “the days of his flesh” (5:7)—was specifically Jewish. God’s Son assumed our humanity in a particular race and took on the history of that race. He came to the earth and learned the ways of men by becoming part of Jewish history.

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## December 25. Hebrews 2:1–18

**I**n this chapter, we find our earliest extant Christian commentary on Psalm 8, which is a treatise on the Incarnation. The question under consideration is “What is man?” or, if the translator is sensitive to feminist concerns, “What is a human being?” That is to say, in some recent translations of the Psalms, this question introduces considerations of anthropology.

According to the author of Hebrews, however, the reliable way to a correct anthropology—the accurate response to the question, “What is a human being?”—depends on the answer to a prior theological question: “What do you think of the Christ? Whose son in he?” In other words, the proper address to anthropology is through the gate of Christology.

The most correct wording of the dogma of the Incarnation is the one to which we are accustomed: “He became man.” This translation, which leaves the implied article undetermined, means Christ is the archetype of man, bearing all of humanity in himself. “It was for the new man that human nature was established from the beginning,” wrote St. Nicholas Kavalas; “the old Adam was not the model of the new, it was the new Adam that was the model of the old.” Christ is how the author of Hebrews approaches the subject of human beings.

This approach to anthropology, taken from Holy Scripture, is normative in Christian thought. According to the Christian faith, when God gave our forefather Adam dominion over the earth and its fullness, that act was a prophecy of the universal subjection of creation to the reign of Christ. Such is the true meaning of Psalm 8: “You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.”

According to this perspective, Christ is no divine afterthought; he is the original meaning of humanity. Christ is what God had in mind when he reached down and formed that first lump of mud into a man. Again, in the words of St Nicholas Kavalas: “It was towards Christ that man’s mind and desire were oriented. We were given a mind that we might know Christ, and desire, that we might run to him; and memory, that we might remember him, because even at the time of creation it was he who was the archetype.”

According to this interpretation of Psalm 8, “we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (2:9). That is to say, God’s Son assumed our flesh in order obediently to die in that flesh, and this is how the human race was redeemed.

In the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons followed the same theological line as the author of Hebrews, but he adorned it by introducing the Pauline contrast between Christ and Adam. According to Irenaeus, the Word’s assumption of the flesh was required for our salvation because Adam’s sin had been committed in the flesh. Sin in the flesh required salvation in the flesh. He explained, “So the Word was made flesh in order that sin, destroyed by means of that same flesh through which it had gained mastery and taken hold and lorded it, should no longer be in us,” and “that so he might join battle on behalf of our forefathers and vanquish through Adam what had stricken us through Adam” (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 31).

The mediation of Christ, which is a major theme of this book, means his solidarity with the rest of the human race. To save us from our sins, he must be *one* of us. Such is the burden of this section, which speaks of Jesus in terms of brotherhood: “He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: ‘I will declare your name to my brethren’. . . . Therefore, in all things he had to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God” (2:11–12,17). Before a priest can be a father, he must be a brother; that is to say, he must be “taken from among men” (5:1).

Thus, when Jesus sent Mary Magdalene to proclaim his Resurrection to the Church, he instructed her, “Go and tell my brethren” (John 20:17). More particularly, Jesus claims brotherhood with all mankind in the context of history’s final judgment, where we learn, “inasmuch as you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). Jesus’ proclaimed solidarity of brotherhood with the whole human race means that the proper destiny of that race is a true community, founded and centered on the Incarnation.

Here in Hebrews this solidarity with the rest of human beings especially pertains to death: God’s Son assumed our humanity in order to *die* as a human being. Some chapters later, our author will repeat this thesis, citing the Book of Psalms: “Therefore, when he came into the world, he said:

‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
But a body you have prepared for me.

In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin  
You had no pleasure.  
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—  
In the volume of the book it is written of me—  
To do your will, O God.'" (10:5-7)

That is to say, the obedience of Christ was to fulfill and replace the various sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, and for this task the Son obviously required a body.

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## December 26. St. Stephen

**B**ecause a popular carol proclaims it as the day on which "Good King Wenceslaus looked out," this feast day is fairly well known even among Christians who do not celebrate it. Throughout the centuries Christian preachers have been ingenious in explaining the propriety of celebrating the feast of Stephen immediately after Christmas. The historical fact is, however, that Stephen's feast fell on this day long before Christmas was observed on December 25. A second-century source already tells us that local Christian churches had the custom of observing the anniversary days of the deaths of their martyrs. Thus, there is every probability that Stephen's feast day goes back to the earliest period of the Christian Church, even to the lifetime of the apostles. Since Stephen was martyred in Jerusalem, we are certain that this early Church was the origin of his feast day. The first extant account of the event is found, of course, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, appointed to be read today.

Abandoning the sound counsel of Gamaliel in the previous chapter, the Sanhedrin responds to charges brought against Stephen by certain international groups of Jews living in Jerusalem. Invited to explain himself, Stephen begins his long discourse, which is chiefly a historical survey constructed to show that Israel, throughout its history, has ever been disposed to idolatry and rebellion. Its recent killing of the Messiah, Stephen argues, is of a piece with all of Israel's earlier sins.

He begins to recount these, stage by stage, starting with the call of Abraham in ancient Mesopotamia. His point in starting in Mesopotamia is to show that God's Word is not limited to the Holy Land nor tied to the temple or any Jewish institution. To demonstrate this point, Stephen speaks of the endless wandering characteristic of the patriarchal period. Even the covenant itself, he notes, was prior to the conception of Isaac. (This characteristic of the covenant with Abraham, particularly its priority to the Mosaic Law, will be an important aspect of the treatment of Abraham in Galatians, Romans, and Hebrews.)



In Stephen's discussion of Joseph (verse 9), he begins to introduce the theme of jealousy and rebellion, taking the attitude of Joseph's sinful brothers as a foreshadowing of Israel's rejection of Jesus. Their cruel treatment of Joseph makes him a type or figure of the coming Messiah, who, albeit innocent and unoffending, would also be condemned, sold, arrested, and put in prison.

Then, Stephen goes on, a pagan pharaoh would receive favorably the very one that the sons of Israel had rejected, accepting him as their "leader." Again, those events formed a foreshadowing of Jesus' rejection by the Israelites and his turning to the Gentiles. Here Stephen is addressing one of the most important messages of the Acts of the Apostles.

Stephen's point in 7:11 is that the Israelites, not able to feed themselves, were dependent on a pagan people. Thus Jacob, father of all Israelites, died outside of the Holy Land, along with all the tribal patriarchs. Though they were buried in the Holy Land, the site of their graves was purchased from yet another Gentile (verse 16). Meanwhile, it was in a Gentile land that the Israelites experienced their phenomenal growth. Even Moses was raised in a Gentile home and received a Gentile education (verse 22). He, too, was repudiated by the other Israelites, who have never, Stephen contends, shown themselves satisfied with the leaders that God sends them.

Moses' first encounter with the other Israelites was not very promising, Stephen argues; they did not want him for a "leader" (verse 27) or a savior (verse 28). As a result, yet once again, God's designated leader of the Israelites was obliged to flee to yet another Gentile region, the land of Midian.

Like Abraham (7:6), Moses must become a "wanderer" or "pilgrim" (*paroikos*—7:29—the root of our word "parishioner"). Indeed, the very first land in the Bible to be called a "holy land" is found, not in Palestine, but in the Gentile territory of Moses' wandering (verse 33)! It always seems to be the same pattern, says Stephen, because the Israelites are a rebellious people, recalcitrant to God's provision. Thus, Moses will be treated by them no better than Joseph.

Since the Israelites rejected Moses as "leader and deliverer," in spite of his miracles, how could we expect them to treat differently the latter day "prophet" that God would "raise up"? Here, of course, Stephen is citing the same text (Deuteronomy 18:15) earlier cited by Peter in Acts 3:22–23.

In this fairly lengthy treatment of Moses, Stephen is answering the accusation that he had blasphemed against Moses (cf. 6:11). He is saying, in effect: "Look, you stiff-necked people. I am not the one who insults Moses; you people have never stopped insulting him, right from the inception of his ministry. Even then you were already idolaters (verses 39–43).

Just as in the desert you worshipped a “work of your hands” in the golden calf, so you now idolize the temple itself (verse 48).

In making this assertion, Stephen is specifically addressing one of the charges brought against him (cf. 6:13–14). Instead of defending himself, however, Stephen directly attacks his accusers (verses 51–53). His trial will end rather abruptly.

Several aspects of Stephen’s death may be noted. First, the change in tone. Bitterly denouncing the Israelites near the end of his testimony, Stephen now devoutly prays for them, holding no grudge. (See the moving description by Dante, *Purgatorio* 15.106–114.)

Second, Stephen is once again said to be “full of the Holy Spirit,” as was the case when he was first introduced (cf. 6:3). This relates his martyrdom to the Pentecostal outpouring. The Christian Church has, from the beginning, always regarded blood martyrdom as the highest of the charismatic gifts and the most convincing testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Third, he calls Jesus “the Son of Man,” the only person in the New Testament, save Jesus himself, to do so.

Fourth, Stephen is never condemned by the Sanhedrin, which in any case was not authorized to implement a death sentence (cf. John 18:31). He is murdered, rather, by a lawless mob, with no pretense at legal procedure.

Fifth, like Jesus himself (John 19:20; Hebrews 13:12), he is executed outside the city wall. Even in this massive miscarriage of justice, Stephen’s murderers adhere to the Mosaic prescription (Leviticus 24:14; Numbers 15:35f).

Sixth, and as a great feature of irony, it is in this scene that St. Paul is first introduced (cf. Acts 22:20; 26:10).

Seventh, Luke takes great care to observe the similarities between the deaths of Jesus and Stephen; compare verses 59–60 with Luke 23:34 and 46. (This literary feature was noted very early by Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 3.12.13.)

Eighth, Stephen’s death unleashes a violence that causes many Christians to flee Jerusalem, thus spreading the gospel even farther. Some of them go to Samaria, where those persecuted at Jerusalem stood a good chance of a sympathetic welcome, especially if, like Stephen, they expressed reservations about the temple at Jerusalem!

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## December 28. Obadiah

Convinced that God speaks at specific points in history, the canonical editors of the Holy Scriptures often ascribe particular time frames to the messages of the prophets. This is not the case with Obadiah. Though

a dozen or so men in the Bible bore that name, the absence of a genealogical reference at the beginning of the Book of Obadiah makes it difficult to identify our prophet with any of them. Was he the Obadiah known to Elijah in 1 Kings 18? This identification, favored in some Jewish sources and in standard works of Christian hagiography, is obviously attractive, but it collapses under the book's internal evidence. The author of the Book of Obadiah was clearly from Judah, not the Northern Kingdom, and the past events to which he refers occurred much later than the ninth century before Christ.

The one thing we do know for certain about the author of the Book of Obadiah is that he took a decidedly dim view of the Edomites. Nor was Obadiah alone in that respect, for there is reason to believe that more than one Israelite was somewhat tried by Deuteronomy's injunction not to despise the Edomite (23:7). Those descendants of Esau, after all, had obstructed the Chosen People's way to the Promised Land in the days of Moses (Numbers 20:21), and according to the prophet Amos in the eighth century, the Edomites, having "cast off all pity" (Amos 1:11), were involved in the international slave trade (1:6,9).

Edom's most memorable offenses, however, occurred when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587. At that time, they rejoiced at the city's downfall (Lamentations 4:21), exploiting its misfortune in a vengeful way (Ezekiel 25:12). Most serious of all was the vile complicity of the Edomites in the demolition of Solomon's temple, an outrage for which they are explicitly cursed in the hymnography of Israel and the Church (cf. Psalms 137:7).

This final offense likewise inspired a line of Psalm 137, a lament composed in captivity "by the rivers of Babylon" (verse 1), where the exiles sat and wept, remembering Zion. Reflecting on the holy city's recent, ruthless destruction, the psalmist bitterly recalled Edom's share in the matter: "Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom / The day of Jerusalem, / Who said, 'Raze it, raze it, / To its very foundation!'"

Obadiah's prophecy testifies that his own rancor toward the Edomites was prompted by the identical recollection. He particularly blames them for rejoicing at Jerusalem's downfall, despoiling the city, blocking the path of escape against those who fled, and handing the refugees over to their captors (verses 12-14). He can scarcely forget that the descendants of Esau were, in fact, blood relatives of the Israelites. Like Amos, who had earlier accused Edom of pursuing "his brother with the sword" (Amos 1:11), Obadiah speaks of "violence against your brother Jacob" (verse 10). His words stand forever in Holy Scripture as a warning to those who rejoice at or take advantage of the tribulations of others, or who neglect the ancestral ties that should prompt a readier compassion.

The prophetic doom pronounced by the Bible against the Edomites was vindicated in their displacement by the Nabateans in the fourth century B.C. Forced to migrate to southern Palestine, they were eventually subjugated by John Hyrcanus (134–104 B.C.). From that point on, they were simply assimilated into Judaism. One of them, named Herod, even became a king of the Jews, but he always sensed that someday a real descendant of David might appear on the scene and challenge his claim to the throne. It made him very nervous and unreasonable. In our Gospel selection, we read about him today, too.

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## December 29. The Book of Deuteronomy

**F**rom today until the beginning of Holy Week, we will examine two books that took their inspiration from the seventh century before Christ, Deuteronomy and the prophecy of Jeremiah. We begin Deuteronomy today and will start reading Jeremiah at the beginning of February.

The eight-year-old Josiah, born in 648 B.C., unexpectedly inherited the throne of Judah in 640, when his father Amon was murdered. Only two years earlier, Josiah's wicked grandfather, the executioner of the prophet Isaiah, had died after a reign of 55 years (2 Kings 21:1).

The religion of Judah at that time was in shambles; official idolatry was rife, having been the policy of the crown for more than half a century. Young Josiah, however, was converted to the Lord at age 16, and when, in 628, he officially took over the duties of kingship at age 20, he immediately set about the moral and religious reform of the nation (2 Chronicles 34:3). It is worth noting that during the very next year, 627, the extremely young Jeremiah received his call as a prophet.

Josiah's extensive reforms, described in 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35, included a complete overhaul of the interior of Jerusalem's temple, which had long been polluted by various forms of idolatry and liturgical aberration. In the course of this refurbishing of the temple in 622, the high priest Hilkiah chanced upon a scroll tucked away in some obscure nook or corner. When this scroll, identified simply as "the Law of the Lord," was brought to the king's attention, it added a new impetus and more defined direction to the ongoing reform of the nation.

Inasmuch as the specifics of Josiah's reform from this point forward corresponded to certain explicit injunctions of the Book of Deuteronomy, students of the Bible, as far back as St. Jerome at the beginning of the fifth century A.D., have been persuaded that the scroll discovered in 622 was the Book of Deuteronomy, or at least its central core.

The Book of Deuteronomy contains the final exhortation of Moses to the Israelites just before his death on Mount Nebo. The book recounts the

Lord's many wonders performed on behalf of his Chosen People during their forty years of wandering, how he daily fed them with manna, put to flight their enemies, and so forth. Toward the end of the book there is a renewal of the Sinai Covenant, just before the people's crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. At last comes the death of Moses.

The central truth of Deuteronomy is the unity of God—"the Lord thy God is one Lord." And because God is one, he is to be worshiped with the whole being, without exception—"thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, thy whole soul, thy whole strength." An inner unity of man's being is his response to the unity of God.

Deuteronomy's emphasis on the "covenant of the heart" was also to become a principal concern of Jeremiah, the prophet whose early ministry was contemporary with the reforms of King Josiah.

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## January 6. The Feast of the Epiphany

This is the last of the twelve days of Christmas. *Theophany*, the Greek name of this traditional feast, by which it is called in the Eastern Church, means "manifestation of God." *Epiphany*, the Greek name by which it is called among Western Christians, means simply "manifestation." The fact that it has a Greek name even in the West indicates that the feast is Eastern in origin. Now part of the Christmas season, Theophany is certainly earlier than Christmas. Dating back to the second century, it was originally a feast celebrating the baptism of Jesus, at which, not only is he revealed as God's Son, but the Father and the Holy Spirit are revealed as well.

Among Christians of the Orthodox East, this is still the emphasis of the feast. It was not adopted by the West until the fourth century, and then as part of the Christmas festival. In the West it looked in particular at three events of Jesus' life: the adoration of the Magi ("We Three Kings of Orient Are"), the baptism of Jesus, and the miracle at Cana of Galilee, which was "the first of Jesus' signs" and caused his disciples to believe in him. The lectionary tradition of the West has consistently included all three events. For example, among the Anglicans, Archbishop Cranmer was careful to put all three readings into the *Book of Common Prayer* for this day. In the lectionary arrangement of this *Devotional Guide*, special effort has been taken to read all three stories either near or on the day itself.

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## January 8. The Epistle to Titus

Luke was the Church's first historian, but it is uncanny the things he left out of the Acts of the Apostles. Perhaps most notable among the

omissions is any reference to Titus. Luke certainly knew Titus, who visited Macedonia sometime in A.D. 56/57 (2 Corinthians 7:6), a period when Luke lived there (comparing Acts 16:10 and 20:6).

Luke's silence about Titus is not overly surprising, on the other hand, because there were several of Paul's other companions that he did not mention; Epaphras and Demas come to mind, both of whom were certainly known to Luke (cf. Colossians 4:12–14). Nor, for that matter, does Luke mention the brothers Tertius and Quartus (Romans 16:22–23), though he does refer to their older sibling, Secundus (Acts 20:4).

Titus first appears in the New Testament as an associate of Paul during the latter's second post-conversion journey to Jerusalem in 51. The relevant timetable seems to stand as follows: If we date Paul's conversion at about 34, his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem was in 37, three years later (Galatians 1:18; Acts 9:26–30). His second such visit, then, which we know occurred fourteen years after that (Galatians 2:1), was in 51.

This timetable fits perfectly with what we may discern in Acts. From an inscription discovered at Delphi, it is clear that Gallio became proconsul of Greece in June of 51, which gives us our earliest possible date for Paul's appearance before Gallio (Acts 18:12–17). It was after that event that Paul crossed over to Ephesus (18:18–20). He did not stay long in Ephesus. Some manuscripts of Acts 18:21 indicate that he was in a hurry to arrive at Jerusalem for a coming feast, which would have to have been an autumnal feast, perhaps Sukkoth. This was Paul's second such visit, the one documented in Galatians 2:1, which also indicates that Titus was with him. He had evidently joined Paul's company during the previous two years.

The sudden appearance of this Gentile Christian in the Jerusalem church was a bit awkward, "because of false brethren secretly brought in" (Galatians 2:4). These demanded that Titus be circumcised. In spite of some Western manuscripts to the contrary, along with Augustine, Luther, and others, it seems certain that Paul did not give in on this point, putting Titus as a "test case" on the matter of Gentile circumcision. James, Peter, and John took his side on the question (2:3–9).

Titus next appears sometime in 56. From Ephesus Paul had previously dispatched him, as his own "partner and fellow worker" (2 Corinthians 8:23), to visit the chronically troubled church at Corinth. Paul himself later headed westward to Troas, having arranged to meet Titus there, in order to receive a report about the Corinthians. When he arrived at Troas, however, Titus was not there (2:12–13). Perhaps he had been unable to obtain passage. Sometimes cruises from Neapolis to Troas were delayed. After all, because the current through the Dardanelles flowed

southwestward (the Black Sea being considerably cooler than the more rapidly evaporating and saltier waters of the Aegean), ships sailing east from Neapolis to Troas sometimes took much longer than ships traveling in the opposite direction. As we may see by comparing Acts 16:11 and 20:6, they could take more than three times as long. In any event, the anxious Paul decided to cross over to Macedonia (Acts 20:1), where he happily found Titus (2 Corinthians 7:6). Titus himself was overjoyed by the changes he could report about the Corinthian church, where he had been so well received (7:13—8:6, 16).

It seems to have been in late 56 that Paul took Titus to Crete, where he left him to oversee the new missions there (Titus 1:5–9). He himself went back to Macedonia and Illyricum (Romans 15:19). From somewhere in that region, Paul wrote the epistle to Titus—begun today—instructing him with respect to the ministries on Crete. He asked Titus to return to him, however, whenever Artemas or Tychicus should arrive in Crete to take his place in the mission. Paul mentioned that he planned to spend that winter of 56–57 at Nicopolis, a city of Epirus, south of Dalmatia (3:12). One suspects that Titus did return, because it would appear that Titus joined Paul and was still with him even during some of his time in Rome (61–62). When we last hear of Titus, Paul had sent him from Rome back to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10). Titus was clearly a loyal man on whom the apostle could rely, a minister who would not abuse his position (2 Corinthians 12:17–18).

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## January 13. Without Begats

One of the most obvious features of the Bible—and most noticeable to its new readers—is the presence of what are called the “begats.” We are told, for instance, that Adam *begat* Cain and Abel, that Joshua *begat* Eleazar, that Hezron *begat* Pheres, and so forth.

These “begats” are not just *occasional* parts of Holy Scripture. Not only are they sometimes lumped into lost lists, but they likewise appear to provide continuity to the Bible’s narrative structure.

Thus, the uninitiated reader, informed that the Holy Scriptures are very interesting and important, comes to Genesis 5, for instance, rather early in his pursuit of God’s Word. Here he finds his first list of *begats*. Unaware that this is only the first of many such parts, he plods on and manages to finish chapter 5. Interest in the story picks up for the next four chapters, which deal with Noah and the Flood, but then he arrives at Genesis 10, which is simply one long, solid list of *begats*. It is arguable that many a newcomer to the Bible completely breaks down at this point, never getting past chapter 10.

It seems that many such readers, faced with this dilemma, decide to jump ahead to the New Testament, perhaps with the resolve to come back to the Old Testament at a later date. The person who takes this step, however, suddenly finds himself with the first chapter of Matthew, which commences with a list of 42 more *begats*. Many early efforts to read Holy Scripture simply die and are buried at that point, and the Bible is closed forever.

Fortunately, this pattern among new Bible-readers is not universal, and some brave souls do manage to survive the *begats* of Genesis 10. For such as these, it must come as something of a relief to arrive at Genesis 14 and discover a character who is *not* included in such a list.

His name is Melchizedek, and he appears as though out of nowhere: “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18). We are not told where Melchizedek came from, nor does he ever again appear in the biblical narrative; there is not a word about his death or his descendants. He shows himself just this brief moment, but in this brief moment he is described as greater than Abraham: “Now consider how great this man was, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils” (Hebrews 7:4). In the person of Abraham, even the Old Testament priesthood of Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek. Thus, Melchizedek “without father, without mother, without *begats*, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually” (7:3).

Melchizedek’s kingship and priesthood stand outside the *begats*. The very brevity of his appearance in the biblical story—which forms but an instant in the narrative, and not an element of sequence—becomes a symbol of eternity, inasmuch as eternity is an unending “now,” an instant without sequence. Our experience of eternity in this world is always an instant—a “now”—not a sequence. Thus, the “now-ness” of Melchizedek’s kingship and priesthood represents the eternal “today” of the sonship of Christ: “You are my Son, / Today I have begotten you” (Psalm 2:7; Hebrews 5:5).

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## January 18. The Mystery of the Blood

**B**ecause the blood represented life at its deepest contact with God, all the Old Testament sacrifices prescribed for sin were blood sacrifices. Other sorts of sacrifices were offered, but for the sin offering only blood would suffice. As Hebrews will say in the text we read tomorrow, “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (9:22).

The shedding of the blood of the sacrificial victim was the symbolic gift of self to God on the part of the sinner. He was reconciled to God—found atonement with God—through the symbolic shedding of the



animal's blood in place of his own. Whenever the relationship between God and man was disrupted by sin, it was required that that disruption be mended by the total gift of self, symbolized in the mactation of the sacrificed animal.

Because the sacrifices of the Old Testament were only symbolic, it was "not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (10:4). As we read here, "if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (9:13-14).

It is in this sense that the blood of Christ is the price of our redemption: Jesus poured out his inner being in loving adoration to his Father on our behalf. The image of Christ's blood in the New Testament always implies the understanding of the blood in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, in which the shedding of the blood means the restoration of the sinner to friendship with God.

This imagery of the blood, which is ubiquitous in the New Testament, began with Jesus himself, who told his disciples, on the night before his death, "this is my covenant blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

Because Jesus used this language within the liturgical ceremony at the center of the Christian religion, it is not surprising that we find it everywhere in the New Testament. Thus, St. Peter wrote, "You were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). And St. John wrote, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). And St. Paul wrote, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7).

And the Christian Church chants to Jesus our Lord: "To him who loved us and freed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us a kingdom and priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6).

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## January 26. Abel, Enoch & Noah

Prior to the calling of Abraham, God provided the human race with certain introductory instruction through the deep perceptions of three patriarchs: Abel, Enoch, and Noah. In what Holy Scripture says of these men, we discern the initial steps of human education.

First, Abel examined the structure of the world around him and reached the conclusion "that things which are seen were not made by

things which do appear" (Hebrews 11:3). The "thing-ness" of the world, that is to say, was not self-explanatory. The world was not its own cause. On the contrary, it gave "evidence of things not seen" (11:1). Abel's probing mind, gazing at this visible world, laid hold on certain invisible truths.

Chief among these, we suppose, were the simplest rational principles (such as causality and non-contradiction) and the basic axioms and elementary theorems of the mathematical order. These interests emerged from the intellect's encounter with empirical data. Abel's mind perceived in matter an explanatory reference, and this perception laid the foundation for logical discipline and, in due course, metaphysics.

It is not without interest to reflect that Abel was a shepherd; the pastoral life was eminently compatible with the leisured intellectual exertion required for mathematics and metaphysics. Standing guard over his flock as it grazed on the grass of the fields, Abel sought deeper nourishment from a greener pasture. He sharpened the earliest human hunger for "the substance of things hoped for" (11:1).

In the first generation that followed man's alienation from God, then, Abel took the first human step back in the direction of Eden. In the world of things seen, he perceived God's most basic self-testimony. This spiritual perception was an act of faith, in which Abel understood that "the worlds were framed by the Word of God" (11:3).

Abel's thought was followed by that of Enoch, who discerned the moral structure of existence. It was clear to Enoch, not only that God is, but also that "he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." To the deductions of mathematics, therefore, and the insights of metaphysics, Enoch added the requirements of the moral order. He perceived that whatever separated true from false also separated good from evil.

In the transition from Abel to Enoch we trace the noetic step from the invisible things clearly seen to the law written in the heart—man's conscience bearing witness to his responsibility. Just as Abel discerned the human mind as the locus where the universe learned the truth about itself, Enoch perceived in the human conscience the classroom where the universe was instructed about right and wrong.

The biographies of Abel and Enoch testify that neither man lived very long. The first was driven from this world by a violent human hand, and the second was summoned forth by a divine impatience, unwilling to wait longer for the delight of his company.

Since neither thinker remained long on the earth, it fell to a third patriarch to discover the moral structure of history; this discovery requires a bit more time. Living longer than Abel and Enoch, Noah carried their teachings to his consideration of culture and human affairs. If Abel was a metaphysician and Enoch a moralist, Noah was a prophet.

Tutored by the patriarchal tradition, which affirmed that God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, the observant and logical Noah became certain that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). Metaphysics and the moral order drove his mind to the necessity of the retributive *eschata*. Evil was unnatural; it could not go on indefinitely. Driven by the fear such a perception engendered in his soul, Noah got busy and “prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Hebrews 1:7).

Thus, in the three major patriarchs who followed the Fall, the human mind was enabled to grasp the true structure and significance of the world, to lay hold on the moral foundations of reality, and to act on a correct understanding of human events.

In this progression, humanity was duly prepared for the vocation of Abraham. Even as he dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, Abraham was the heir of a thorough and intense tutelage. Though he left Ur not knowing whither he went, he was in no doubt about the universe—and university—he came from.

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## February 1. Jeremiah

**T**he book named for the Prophet Jeremiah contains not only prophetic oracles pronounced over several decades, but also various sermons and third-person stories about the prophet himself. Much of this last material, as well as the final editing of the whole book, appears to come from the hand of Jeremiah’s secretary, Baruch.

Baruch was of immense importance to this prophet, whose life was burdened with great loneliness and desolation. Most of Jerusalem’s citizens, suffering from chronic shallowness and terminal optimism, thought him something of an oddity, a crank, and a nuisance, maybe even a public menace. They accused him (37:13–14), conspired against him (18:18), seized him (26:8), sought his life (11:21), struck him and put him in stocks (20:2), imprisoned him (32:3), kidnapped him (chs. 42–43), and threw him in a deep pit where he nearly died from hunger (38:6–9). In short, Jeremiah was obliged to “go it alone.” His was a more than ordinary personal desolation, inasmuch as he embraced a life of consecrated celibacy and asceticism as a prophetic sign of Jerusalem’s approaching devastation (16:1–5).

Because the shape of his own soul was formed by his internal identification with the tragic history of his people, there was a special efficacy in Jeremiah’s prayer for them. So much was this the case that on three occasions the Lord felt obliged, as it were, to order Jeremiah to stop praying! (7:16; 11:14; 14:11). It was as though the prophet’s intercession was

so persuasive and effective that God himself would be unable to resist it. It was largely as an intercessor that Israel later thought of Jeremiah, described in the dream of Judas Maccabaeus as “a lover of the brethren, who prays much for the people, and for the holy city” (2 Maccabees 15:14).

The prayers of Jeremiah, intense in their tone and unique in their frequency, are essential to the understanding of his message and his historical significance. If, especially after the tragic death of King Josiah at the Battle of Megiddo in 609 B.C., Jeremiah's prayers became progressively darker, this trait reflected but the deepening shadows of his life, and these shadows, in turn, were cast by the inevitable, trampling fate that trod its way toward Jerusalem.

Nearly all of the Book of Jeremiah was composed under the grim, gathering cloud that stormed forth at last in 587, when the Babylonian invader came to destroy Jerusalem and its temple. The inevitability of that coming destruction had been foretold by Huldah the prophetess in 622 (cf. 2 Kings 22:16–17), and the keenly perceptive Jeremiah discerned its taking shape in the politics and cultural life of his day. Interpreting that approaching doom was the very substance of Jeremiah's ministry, and his prayer was integral to that interpretation.

The Lord was on the point of destroying the very institutions that he had for centuries cultivated and sustained, and in the heart of Jeremiah the city's looming destruction assumed metaphysical dimensions. It suggested to his mind both the overthrow of nature and the dissolution of history. Thus, it was Jeremiah's destiny to assume the impending tragedy of Israel into the fabric of his own heart, an experience that filled him with a deep feeling of radical alienation from God. He struggled in the darkness:

O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble,  
Why should you be like a stranger in the land,  
And like a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? (14:8)

Will you surely be to me like an unreliable stream,  
As waters that fail? (15:18)

Do not be a terror to me;  
You are my hope in the day of doom. (17:17).

Jeremiah's prayer was shaped, therefore, by the contours of Israel's tragedy:

Oh, that my head were waters,  
And my eyes a fountain of tears,

That I might weep day and night  
For the slain of the daughter of my people! (9:1)

Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me,  
A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! (15:10)

But his word was in my heart like a burning fire  
Shut up in my bones;  
I was weary of holding it back. (20:9)

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## February 2. The Presentation in the Temple

The presentation of our Lord in the temple is an account found *only* in the Gospel of Luke (2:22–40). This is the Messiah’s first visit to the temple in Jerusalem, a site that Luke makes a foundation stone of his literary structure. Moreover, near the end of Jesus’ first visit to the temple, Luke remarks that the prophetess Anna “spoke of him to all those who looked for the redemption in Jerusalem” (2:38). The real “redemption in Jerusalem” takes place, of course, in the last pages of Luke, describing the sufferings, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. These are the events included in what Luke’s original Greek text calls Jesus’ *exodos*, “which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (9:31).

Luke’s story takes for granted the full significance of the temple. He presumes that the reader is familiar with the Lord’s assumption of “residence” there shortly after its completion (1 Kings 8), his departure from it at the time of its destruction (Ezekiel 10), and his return there when the temple was rebuilt (Haggai 2:1–9; Zechariah 8–9).

Luke especially presumes the prophecy of the Messiah’s coming appearance at the temple, an oracle found near the end of the last prophetic book of the Hebrew Scriptures: “And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:1).

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## February 5. The Epistle to the Romans

By the end of the first century, it was already common to speak of Peter and Paul as the “founders” of the church at Rome (cf. Clement of Rome, *Corinthians* 5; Ignatius of Antioch *Romans* 4), but this designation should be understood as indicating Rome’s special apostolic authority among the churches (cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies* 3.1.1; 3.3.2), not in the usual historical sense of the word “founder.” Neither Paul nor Peter can be understood as “founders” in the latter sense.

With respect to Paul, the present epistle testifies that the church at Rome existed “many years” (15:23) and already enjoyed a favorable reputation (16:19) “throughout the whole world” (1:8), long before his arrival in the city. With respect to Peter, it is nearly impossible to explain why he is not named among the Roman Christians listed in chapter 16 of the present epistle if he were already at Rome at the time. Indeed, the lack of any mention of Peter in Acts 28 makes it difficult to argue that he was present there when Paul arrived about the year 60.

With respect to the historical roots of the Roman church, therefore, we must content ourselves with the reasonable presumption that the Roman pilgrims to Jerusalem, who had been present when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church on the morning of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), formed the first congregation when they returned home to the city on the Tiber. Both Peter and Paul arrived later.

This longest of Paul’s epistles is a theological treatise on a theme that had been thrust toward the center of his interest and concern during the previous six or so years, ever since the Galatian crisis during the early fifties. Paul’s concentration on this theme, justification by faith, in no way indicates that the church at Rome was subject to the same or a similar crisis. It was written during his leisured residence at Corinth from January to March of the year 57 (Acts 20:3). Residing at that time in the home of his friend Gaius (Romans 16:23), which we know was at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14), Paul’s mind is full of plans. It is clear that he thinks of his evangelization of the eastern Mediterranean basin as completed. The churches founded in that region he had now handed over to the care of the pastors whom he had appointed, and he now trusted them to transmit the gospel to the following generations. (Except for those churches destroyed by Muslim invasions, this has been the case, in fact. The gospel still lives vibrantly in the Pauline congregations of the Near and Middle East.)

Paul is now ready to turn his attention to the western end of the Mediterranean basin, especially Italy and Spain, and this epistle, born to its destination by the trusted deaconess Phoebe (16:1), would serve to introduce Paul to those churches, while he himself completed one last task that he had appointed for himself in the east—namely, the transmission to Jerusalem of the collection of alms that had been made among the Pauline churches.

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## February 14. Ash Wednesday

Originally the Lenten fast began on a Monday, as it still does in the Orthodox East. Later, however, the fasting was discontinued on Sun-

days, not only to restore physical strength, but also from the feeling that Sunday was simply too festive a day for such rigor. Thus, the Western churches would be fasting six days a week for six weeks, making a total of 36 days. So in order to bring that number up to the biblical model of 40, the preceding four days were added, thus making Wednesday the first day of the season. Western Christians marked this day with special signs of repentance, one of which was, like the Ninevites of old, to put ashes on top of their heads as a particular sign of turning away from worldliness and renewed devotion to God. Thus, the name Ash Wednesday.

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## February 27. Treasures

**T**wo of the shortest parables in the Gospels are those of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. Probably because they are similar in structure and theme, the New Testament preserves them in sequence. Common to both parables are the elements of discovery, value, sale, and purchase.

Because they manifestly deal with the identical moral situation, it is useful to compare these stories to that of the rich young man, who wants to “have eternal life” (Matthew 19:16). He is like the man in the parables who finds the treasure, whether buried in the field or lying open in the marketplace. The responses of the two men, however, are exactly opposite. In the case of the man in the parables, there is joy in his very despoiling: “for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has” (13:44). However, in the case of the young man whom Jesus invites to make the identical decision, there is nothing but sadness: “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (19:22).

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## March 1. The Death of the Baptist

**I**n this story, attention should be drawn to King Herod’s similarity to the ancient King Saul, who was likewise tormented by the unforeseen but lamentable consequences of an unwise, incautious oath (cf. 1 Samuel 14:24–30, 43–46).

Another Old Testament parallel with this story is perhaps even more obvious. Accordingly, we observe John as a new Elijah, Herod as a new Ahab, and Herodias as a new Jezebel.

In placing the arrest and death of John immediately after the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth, Matthew augments the sense of tragedy in both events. Each prophet, John and Jesus, is rejected by Israel in a single generation. Jesus will now withdraw from the public scene.

# SUNDAY LECTIONARY—WINTER 2017-2018

DATE	LUTHERAN	ANGLICAN	ROMAN CATHOLIC
12/3	Is. 63:16b-17; 64:1-8 1 Cor. 1:3-9 Mark 13:33-37	Is. 64:1-9a 1 Cor. 1:1-9 Mark 13:24-37	Is. 63:16-17,19; 64:2-7 1 Cor. 1:3-9 Mark 13:33-37
12/10	Is. 40:1-11 2 Pet. 3:8-14 Mark 1:1-8	Is. 40:1-11 2 Pet. 3:8-15a,18 Mark 1:1-8	Is. 40:1-5,9-11 2 Pet. 3:8-14 Mark 1:1-8
12/17	Is. 61:1-3,10-11 1 Thes. 5:16-24 John 1:6-8,19-28	Is. 65:17-25 1 Thes. 5:12-28 John 1:6-8,19-28	Is. 61:1-2,10-11 1 Thes. 5:16-24 John 1:6-8,19-28
12/24	2 Sam. 7:1-11,16 Rom. 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38	2 Sam. 7:4,8-16 Rom. 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38	Sam. 7:1-5,8-11,16 Rom. 16:25-27 Luke 1:26-38
12/31	Is. 45:22-25 Col. 3:12-17 Luke 2:25-40	Is. 61:10—62:3 Gal. 3:23-25; 4:4-7 John 1:1-18	Sir. 3:2-6,12-14 Col. 3:12-21 Luke 2:22-40
1/7	Is. 42:1-7 Acts 10:34-38 Mark 1:4-11	Is. 42:1-9 Acts 10:34-38 Mark 1:7-11	Is. 60:1-6 Eph. 3:2-3,5-6 Matt. 2:1-12
1/14	1 Sam. 3:1-10 1 Cor. 6:12-20 John 1:43-51	1 Sam. 3:1-20 1 Cor. 6:11b-20 John 1:43-51	Is. 42:1-4,6-7 Acts 10:34-38 Mark 1:7-11
1/21	Jonah 3:1-5,10 1 Cor. 7:29-31 Mark 1:14-20	Jer. 3:21—4:2 1 Cor. 7:17-23 Mark 1:14-20	1 Sam. 3:3-10,19 1 Cor. 6:13-15,17-20 John 1:35-42
1/28	Deut. 18:15-20 1 Cor. 8:1-13 Mark 1:21-28	Deut. 18:15-20 1 Cor. 8:1b-13 Mark 1:21-28	Jonah 3:1-5,10 1 Cor. 7:29-31 Mark 1:14-20
2/4	Job 7:1-7 1 Cor. 9:16-23 Mark 1:29-39	2 Kings 4:8-37 1 Cor. 9:16-23 Mark 1:29-39	Deut. 18:15-20 1 Cor. 7:32-35 Mark 1:21-28
2/11	2 Kings 2:1-12a 2 Cor. 3:12—4:2 Mark 9:2-9	1 Kings 19:9-18 2 Pet. 1:16-21 Mark 9:2-9	Job 7:1-4,6-7 1 Cor. 9:16-19,22-23 Mark 1:29-39
2/18	Gen. 22:1-18 Rom. 8:31-39 Mark 1:12-15	Gen. 9:8-17 1 Pet. 3:18-22 Mark 1:9-13	Gen. 9:8-15 1 Pet. 3:18-22 Mark 1:12-15
2/25	Gen. 28:10-22 Rom. 5:1-11 Mark 8:31-38	Gen. 22:1-14 Rom. 8:31-39 Mark 8:31-38	Gen. 22:1-2,9-13,15-18 Rom. 8:31-34 Mark 9:2-10